

Statement to NDN regarding Collier County RLSA Restudy White Paper

Submitted by Eastern Collier Property Owners (ECPO)

July 18, 2019

The Eastern Collier Property Owners commend Collier County staff for its efforts throughout the RLSA Restudy. The participatory process led to a white paper that includes many of the program improvements identified during the 5-Year Review, which ECPO continues to support. Some recommendations, however, are in conflict with the existing program, which has served for 17 years as a framework for property owners who have invested tens of millions of dollars in restoration and preservation while voluntarily relinquishing private property rights.

It is important to recognize that the highly respected RLSA program already has resulted in the preservation of 75 square miles (50,000 acres) of land worth a half-billion dollars – at no cost to taxpayers.

ECPO members will continue to advocate for reasonable improvements to the RLSA framework while identifying recommendations that are inconsistent with the adopted program and would jeopardize the voluntary participation of our members, who represent 90 percent of the private land in the RLSA.

ECPO supports the following recommendations:

- The creation of new incentives to permanently retain land for agriculture, which could protect an additional 40,000 acres of agricultural land
- The restoration of flowway and habitat stewardship areas through a balanced incentive policy
- A 45,000-acre limit on the maximum “footprint” of Stewardship Receiving Areas (SRAs)

Additional background:

The RLSA Overlay was adopted by Collier County in 2002 following an extensive and collaborative three-year public process that Collier County oversaw; the implementing Comprehensive Plan Amendment was found in compliance with the growth management requirements of Chapter 163, F.S. and satisfied the mandate of Final Order No. AC-99-002, which in turn resolved a significant private property rights dispute. The RLSAO is also a statutory stewardship program under Chapter 163.3248, F.S.

The adopted goal of the RLSAO is “to protect agricultural activities, to prevent the premature conversion of agricultural land to non-agricultural uses, to direct incompatible uses away from wetlands and upland habitat, to enable the conversion of rural land to other uses in appropriate locations, to discourage urban sprawl, and to encourage development that utilizes creative land use planning techniques.”

For the 17 years since adoption, ECPO members have relied upon the approved RLSAO. In fact, this groundbreaking program has achieved its objective to date only because ECPO members

have voluntarily given up private property rights on their land in exchange for Stewardship Credits. The program thus far has enabled the protection of more than 50,000 acres of private land worth more than a half-billion dollars – at no cost to taxpayers – for environmental preservation, wildlife habitat, water resources, and continuing agriculture. In exchange, property owners agreed to a detailed, incentive-based framework that allows for well-planned areas of development in Eastern Collier County located on lands that meet the adopted suitability criteria of the program.

During the county's mandated 5-Year Review process from 2007-2009, ECPO members participated in more than 30 public meetings, with all stakeholders reaching consensus on key recommendations. The Collier County Board of Commissioners approved moving forward with implementing comprehensive plan amendments; regrettably, the amendments were never transmitted or adopted – despite a requirement to do so – and now, a decade later, remain as unfinished business. ECPO supports adoption of these recommendations.

ECPO Members

The following property owners represent 90 percent of the private land in the Eastern Collier RLSA:

Alico, Inc.

Barron Collier Investment, Ltd.

Collier Enterprises Management, Inc.

Consolidated Citrus Limited Partnership

English Brothers Partnership

Half Circle L Ranch, LLP

Heller Bros. Packing Corp.

JB Ranch

Owl Hammock Immokalee, LLC

Pacific Land, Ltd.

Sunniland Family Limited Partnership